

Every time I talk about my work it is different. Tonight I am going to go right back to when I was at art school.

This painting I did in Newcastle as an undergraduate student, and it was called *Newcastle Boogie-Woogie*. You probably know of another painting called *Broadway Boogie Woogie*. This painting was heavily influenced of course by Mondrian, but it was also, strangely enough, influenced by Jackson Pollock. What I was trying to do at this point was to resolve those two enormously important influences. The painting is made up of taped bands of color that were laid down at regular intervals; and then I would lay down another set of bands of color going in the opposite direction. Horizontal, vertical, horizontal, vertical: the groups of bands would be cut off at different measurements and widths, and different layers would be laid down with a system so that arbitrary divisions would occur. The small sections that you see there are not painted in; they are just the result of bands of color that have been overlapped by other bands of color. These paintings I did for about three years in this way. I would begin them very loosely with a brush, horizontally and vertically. The first one was a square painting which I made after a trip to Morocco. It was a vertically striped painting and I remember putting down a set of bands. I didn't know what to do with it after that so I turned the painting again and ended up with a grid. And that was the first grid painting.

This picture was done with a spray gun. At the back you can see some dark, diagonal bands. I was toying with the idea of making a diagonal grid, but I went back to the vertical and horizontal because of the relationship with the picture edge. The important thing for me at this time was not necessarily the image, although that is what one is left with, but the method. The paintings were physical. They had physical facts. The pieces of color that you see at the back were the result of something right through the surface, consistent. You would end up with a lot of squares that would be subverting the opticality of the picture, and so finally there was a lot of tension between the layering of bands of color and the spaces between them.

This was another one of the series painted around 1972 called *Red Light*. That was a big issue for me, the issue of light. I did a number of diagonal paintings, and on some I cut them down on the lower edges. The painting drifted off from three edges and was

Abby McEwen

Comment [1]: Title?

composed very consciously on the remaining two edges. The idea was that it would become environmental in the way that the top three edges would be torn off, the lines would be torn off – that is how I ended up with that shape. The color in this painting came about from the desire to open up the color at the back (making it very strong) and stamp it down at the top, all because at this point my concerns started to change. I was less interested in the kind of deep, highly illusioned space that I had been dealing with over the last few years, and I was more interested in the surface of the painting. So when I quieted down the color – you see in some of the areas of the picture the cream overlaps the grey – the surface became something that was very beautiful and more visible. That is an important picture in the development of my work.

[This is a picture] that I did at Harvard where I was fortunate enough to be given a start. I felt like a king. I was given \$2400 that year, and I bought the most expensive paint. This picture I made with rollers. I flattened out the picture considerably by broadening out the spaces between the bands. That for me was where the problem lay. It made the paintings more satisfying in one way, but what I had were passages of active configuration (as I would call the stripe or the band). That is the dynamic issue: it is the replacement for the figure in a figurative sense. The buff areas were the theme “in between.”

This was not something that I did for very long. I went back to doing something that was more densely packed because I didn't want to have to deal with that figure. I didn't want to have to deal with that certain part of the painting that was very active and that certain part of the painting that was less active. I didn't want to have to paint passages in the things in the painting, and the things in the painting were the bands of color (the bars). I didn't want to have to paint the negatives between the bands of color. So this painting was made up of nine squares, with each square related to separate little paintings. It was painted much more slightly, and the amount of illusionistic space was less, obviously. That was a period in which I didn't dally for very long. Again, it was too unsatisfying in many ways. It was most difficult to get from the early illusionistic paintings, which are so perfect in their own way, to something else. It was quite a long, difficult route because I was abandoning illusionism.

[This is a painting] from 1974 which is out of context. So here I started to paint different areas of the painting by hand. I started a particular kind of state in each stage. This was something that I didn't know what it was at the time but that I have recently have rediscovered because it relates to what I do now, much more strongly. At the time I only

Abby McEwen

Comment [2]: Title?

Abby McEwen

Comment [3]: Title?

did a few of these, and then I stopped because I was still trying to bring out something which was more concrete and less illusionistic. [I felt that somehow that the blatant illusionism in the paintings ultimately made profound that which was once overt spatially.]

This is a painting that was shown during our Los Angeles show in a gallery called La Tortue, which means the turtle. I don't know why they called it that, really – I thought at one point maybe because there was a pet shop in the space before the gallery or something – but the show was a tremendous failure. I wondered if it had anything to do with me not finding out. Maybe I should have been more attentive, but I have never shown in Los Angeles since.

This painting is five feet square and is painted backwards – the green horizontal was the first color to be put down and the pink vertical was the next color to be put down, and what happened was that each was done as bands, was just an area of masking tape left on the picture. So the whole picture was painted green and I put the tape on, and then the whole picture was painted pink and I put three pieces of tape on. Then it was all painted dark green and I put four pieces of tape on. It was a very strange way to make a grid painting. I suppose, physically or factually, I denied the space in the painting. I suppose they are psychological crosses. To do something that was sensational, but to do it that way, which was so totally matter-of-fact and physical: it was something that was like a ladder. I did a lot of these backwards paintings. They were very interesting to me for some reason, maybe because they were so perverse. They never gave out any color until they got to the very end. If I didn't like what I got, what I would do was tape up the whole thing and paint it all again in blue, which is the calming ground color and the last color to go on. So if I didn't like it I could paint the whole thing again – or a black painting.

That was the choice here in the show. So here I am. This painting was a decision to see more about what my motives were. What I decided to do was to get everything out of the painting except the one thing that I couldn't bear to get rid of, which were the straight lines. That painting's made by putting masking tape down on the whole surface (black photographic masking tape) and painting it with layers of grey and then slicing it down the middle and taking out one side. That is what you end up with. So the right side is canvas and paint and the left side is paper and tape. The lines which were acrylic lay on the paintings like this; I can't remember whether I put in a whole one.

Abby McEwen

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Abby McEwen

Comment [5]: Title?

This is a detail of a painting four-feet wide and six-feet high. I would mix up four reds which were incredibly closely related. What was interesting about this picture is that the single straps of color help the surface to be interesting all the way across, not just interesting at the seam. The energy falls off towards the outer edges, yet the stripe helps to carry the edges right across, out of the canvas.

This was an experimental painting that I made in Berlin. It was painted directly on a wall and bends 'round the wall a couple of inches. By this time I was using oil paints – very heavily painting, again using massive amounts of tape – but the paint itself was beginning to assert itself in my work. I called this painting *Spider* because it sat in the corner of the wall. This is the picture of the work in progress.

Following on from what I was saying about how these pictures progressed: somehow I got more interested in the scene and less interested in what was going on on the outer edges. I narrowed it down to make the pictures as much about that relationship as possible. I think in terms of the color. And what I was doing in the previous paintings was laying down the coloring in sets – overlapping the color, vertical and horizontal – right through until the painting had finished. I took all those colors and mixed them together. If you do that of course you end up with brown or black, but you end up with very interesting browns or greys and so I mixed the colors for a very long time. They wouldn't just be made out of black, they would be made out of many, many different colors. The profile was extremely complex because the system, or the way the picture was made, was after all very simple, so we could turn it right down to a very simple strategy. I think that it is important again to point out that the bands of color on this did not just supply optical information. That is consistent with all of these. There was a hierarchy on the surface: half of the colors on the slide were “consisting” even if they weren't. One band was set up on top of the other band. So in other words, fifty percent of the ground color went right through it. The paintings were very physical, but the stress had become such an obvious factor in the work; I think it was all along. I think I became impatient with the idea of carefully painting a little square. As much as I love the idea of Mondrian's paintings, there is a kind of patience that is required that I really don't have, and it is something that I am not interested in having.

This painting has an all-over feature. Slightly taller than a person and slightly wider than a person, if you stood and looked at the person from a distance. A lot of the vertical paintings were like that: if you stood at shoulder width I would mark that, and that would determine the width of the painting, would try to establish a very direct relationship with the painting. It wasn't worked out according to some geometric form. That wasn't the issue. The reason I am showing you details is because they are very hard paintings to photograph. Here you can see quite clearly that the red bands on the top have extended quite heavily between the masking tape and the oil paint.

This is the last one of these that I'll show you. The brown color on these two paintings was painted horizontally and the top color was painted vertically. The grid is implied in the material of the painting. This painting is a very big one and is called *Slate*; it is nine-feet wide and four-feet high.

When I was making those black paintings, the reason that I was making them was because I couldn't think of anything else to do. That wasn't it. What I was doing was the thing that I could do that I was least deeply attached to in my work. I wasn't trying to make exciting paintings. I was trying to make paintings that felt very close to me, trying to be selfish. I was also getting ready for something else, which was this. The reason that I have been able to do so many things with these paintings, formally, has got a great deal to do with the length of time that I took to make the other paintings. The other paintings were entirely about detail. They were about very fine decisions. And I think that even that if a painting is visually aggressive and huge with a very open kind of palette, it is the details that make it into something, that move it from something that is not. The time taken on the black paintings was absolutely crucial. These paintings, I could paint something like them before, but it wouldn't have been them. In other words, the decisions wouldn't have been quite the same. The surface weights wouldn't have been judged in quite the same way. It has occurred to me in retrospect that all the work that I have done (in terms of color) has been about layering. Discussing the relationships between my paintings and Rothko's paintings: Rothko's paintings are of course extremely, physically tiring, and mine are moving in exactly the opposite direction. Mine are extremely, physically energetic. But the **guide** to making a mystery in the surface would be the reason that I layered the paint so heavily in the beginning. When I was making the grid painting I didn't know about oil painting and, at that point in time, didn't know about painting in this way. In its own way, that's what it was. It was about oil painting with persistence. It was overpainting in a sense that the bands were

Abby McEwen
Comment [6]: ??

superimposed and, of course and as I said before, the colors mixed in together. With these features the paint is just laid on over and over until I get the paint just right. Here of course the whole situation is opened up with many issues being dealt with at once. Painting 'round the sides, painting with rectangles – dramatic effects brought in with the picture play out in continual interruptions. Having a part of the painting that was drawn and painted (and making it somewhat reminiscent of figures) remained a consistent factor throughout the work. The other was the juxtaposition of the vertical and the horizontal. I have used diagonals in my work, but they are something that I tend to use less often. The reason that I use the horizontal and vertical is because they are the absolute signifiers of energy.

The painting on the right is called *Angel*. This was done in 1984. That painting is a diptych divided equally down the middle. What I wanted to do was to deal with body and spirit. Like Matisse's drawings in the chapel on the fonts, it's just black lines on ground. On the right side is heavy quality.

The painting on the left is called *By Night and By Day*. The reason I called it that is because it has a certain kind of narrative quality, like you can read from left to right. And some of the paintings at this point had that. The paintings around this time oscillated between being about aggressive objects and being about narrative, narrative in a sense that there was a progression from one thing to the next. It goes from a painted surface to another painted surface that is painted differently. It is like a story in surface proportion, color and drive.

This group of small paintings I made out of one talk in a barn. And there was a wonderful experience because the paintings – not so much the big paintings because they were on canvas, but the small paintings – were made in the same way as the barn. They were slabbed together. You can see that the wall is really just as interesting as the paintings. That's OK that the wall is as interesting as the paintings.

The painting on the left is painted on canvas. And I'm not saying that it's a painting that I'm attached to, but at the time I didn't have the dynamic relationship with that environment that I had with these ones. In fact, in that space there were two pieces of wood on the floor that had been left there by another artist. (It is an artist's colony run by Edward Holby, and you get invited to go out there for a month if you are lucky.) I picked

up the two pieces of wood and put one on top of the other and took a picture of it. I could have sawn out pieces of the wall and painted that.

The painting on the far wall, next to the black-and-white painting, which has the orange color is called *Sun*. How I painted that painting has a lot to do with what my paintings are about. It is real time. I painted the larger area one night about four o'clock. Being a lazy person, I like to start work about four in the afternoon and knock off about six. As I was painting, the sun was burning the back of my head and neck; and of course as I was painting I painted what was affecting me. Then the next day I started work even later, and I painted the little panel which is the color of dusk. And I put them together and that is the painting – it is about that relationship. The difference between these paintings and the paintings before is that in the paintings before I was trying to articulate the relationship to the finest degree because I wanted to control the paintings. I think the reason that I use black is because I know a lot about black as a color. I know how to control the relationship; that is the big difference. The relationship is something that I think is strange and wonderful in some way, and that's it. The painting is finished. So I don't try and get the paintings right – which brings me to the next thing that I want to talk about.

This is a little painting on wood, a rectangle cut out, painted separately and then put together. I was going to talk a little bit about trying to get paintings right, which I feel has done a lot of damage to American abstract painting, the only really viable abstract painting in the 1960s. My view is that it got to be so tidy and so correct and so frigid that it became dead. (There are a few artists who have managed to sidetrack in their own way. I don't want to cite people's names, but you know who I am referring to.) The whole idea was that the paintings became a design. The idea of design held some kind of delusion because what one was trying to do was tell a story, and the painting would be designed for all the various characters in the story to be able to play their part. What happened was that the notion of subject matter went out; and what people talked about all the time were desires, how right the painting was. It was not meant to be frivolous, because it was part of human nature. It was just as much part of human nature as anything else. So there can't be an art in our dreams; it can't be expressed or reflected. So the work is going to get more and more academic again.

Looking back to the eighteenth century and the time of Joshua Reynolds, paintings had to have basic premises and a curvature to the light. There was a delight in painting. That

curve became more important than anything else. That is what I mean about academic. There is no relationship to anything anymore.

This is a painting called *North Eagle*. I did another one called *South Eagle*. Obviously something big pushed up from the top of the surface in the painting and lifted up from the edge. It could be the painting or it could be leading the painting. I wanted to make that kind of precarious relationship 'round the edge of the picture, which is why it is now symmetrical. It is a little unstable at the top. It has one black edge at the top and one light edge on the other side. It makes a tilting effect. That inset was painted over a different time, too. It is something that I haven't talked about much, but I think it has a relationship with collage. By that I mean that you can keep the collage out of context; you can bring something in from another context to jolt the viewer. I do this not as overtly as Rothko, say, but I do this in terms of the way the surface is painted and the way that the particular piece is existing.

Here I was dealing with two ascending structures. I left them as uneven as possible, for I wanted them to remain separate with their separate characters and yet have a relationship with each other. They are painted very differently from one side to the next. This is something that I wanted to show you on the slide. I think the other important thing for me with regard to what I was talking about before (when I showed you the painting I was making at home) is that the subject in my painting is the way the stripe is painted. I know that is no different than the way Cézanne painted the apple or the bottle over and over again, but something that is neutral and boring and very receptive to interpretation is a challenge. The other important thing is that everything in the paintings is a thing. There are no spaces between the things. I never had to get from one thing to another thing. The painting is completely full-up and, hopefully, absolutely positive. I am not trying to say that with skepticism or irony. I want my paintings to be totally positive and totally full-up.

This painting is called *Mierta*. The central panel sticks out very far beyond, and again it has a kind of figure-like quality. The panels are meant to be seen as a kind of steady base to the panel in the middle. The panel on the right is there for a kind of take-over, to be a container for the drama that takes place in the center of the picture, where the middle panel projects forward. The panel on the right goes around the sky of the picture. It is that wide because the rest of it is 'round the side, which is indicative of the way I paint.

This is a very big painting. The middle section is painted on wood. It is a pretty flat painting in a sense that there aren't any great projections. The projections at the center are just the thicknesses of the slabs of wood. The pieces of wood are all painted as separate pieces of wood. At that time I was thinking about substituting the drama that I was getting in the painting with something that was more concrete, so I made two of these paintings with painted slats and I painted them very fast, with two buckets. One bucket had black, one had white, and I think I painted it in a day. It is one of my favorite pictures.

This is a painting that I didn't like so much. I painted it, but I thought I would show it and then formally apologize for painting it. It is very interesting because you know when you talk about paintings and they say that it works...that really is the end of the painting. Well, this did not. It sort of falls away, and at the same time it is very insistent, and in a certain sense there is more detail than in the other paintings. There is a very strange content going on in the picture. These panels have of course been placed in a situation where they have to vie for their survival. All panels are put together so that they have to head to their identity with each other. It's one of those paintings that was very difficult to leave.

This is a painting that I painted directly after I returned from a trip to Italy, and it is called *The Green One*. See that strange thing that is painted orange and yellow? It is very difficult to use green if you live in New York. You don't have anything to relate it to so you can't articulate it. You cannot relate it to the world. It's quite simply what it is like to be outside in nature. I was painting in Chicago by Matisse, and I have always wanted to make a response to this. This is how it was painted. I thought I ought to make some photographs of the painting in progress; unfortunately, this painting's passage was very slow. It is really a drag to stop painting and then take a picture and then carry on, so I only did it once! Usually I take panels away and then bring in other panels and change them around, but on this painting I didn't.

This is a more interesting painting, and this represents really what I am more interested in now: hanging things that weren't attached to the edges of the picture and putting them right in the picture. This is a very old idea and comes of course from the window being painted or the painting in painting. The problem with this of course is that it raises the issue of being grounded. But I'll see what I can do. Quite frankly, it is a picture within a picture. I called this picture *Precious*. To get away from this and to somehow sidestep

Abby McEwen
Comment [7]: ??

the danger of making the surrounding area the container of the painting, in the more recent ones I have started to place them asymmetrically and to make them different in their proportions. And they are going great. This picture is six-foot square and was done earlier this year and is a square within a square.

This painting is called *Breath* and is again a six-foot square. There is a painting like this in the shop, but this one is called *Sign*. I wanted to make up a sign of some kind that was one that I hadn't seen before. It is very important to the paintings because as I am sure you know, they are all different. I don't repeat them, do them in different colors, or anything like that. That's what they used to do back in the 1960s.

This painting I called *Stranger* because it adds a vertical, horizontally-striped panel to what would otherwise be a perfectly striped piece. And that is because I tried to paint it many times before it ended up like that. It's a very big painting, about ten feet by eight feet. The outside is painted very differently to the part that is set in. The part set in was painted many, many times to try and get it right.

This painting is called *Pole*. I don't usually name my paintings as esoterically as this, but I was talking with someone called Joe Maschler, who is an art critic, and I had just finished this painting. And he asked me if my father (who was a barber) had a barber's pole outside his shop. And it was true that he did; and he said, "Well there you are." That's imprint: when a little boy is four years old and he keeps seeing something.

This painting I called *Sound* because there is nothing like the way sound travels between two things, like two things are calling out to each other. I should have stretched it out a bit more and it would have made it a better painting; I could have established a more poignant relationship between the two insets. The way I first saw this painting was for that one on the top left to be painted with the same colors, only divided vertically. That is the limit between idea and actuality, or the idea for a painting, or what one has to do to actually realize a painting which has to encompass more than the idea. Otherwise you may as well stay with the idea.

I see all my paintings very clearly before I make them, and when I make them they are completely different. This one is not as different as most of them, which is why I shall talk about it. It demonstrates that point very well. This painting is called *Happy Land*, another very big painting and flat. The paint is less dramatic in some ways, but the insets

are embedded in. This painting is called *Inside*, and as you can see it bears a relationship to previous paintings called *Sign*, where the visitor was still on the threshold of the picture. He has now dropped into the center, or near the center of the picture.

This is a very romantic picture. I called it *By the Force* because it seems manic. Like a car, it seems to be going backwards and forwards, backwards and forwards. It never seems to arrive at a point of rest; it seems to be in perpetual motion. It bothers me very much, which is why I left it. One way that I will leave a painting is if it bothers me too much – if I can have the respect for it. I don't want the paintings to be about me; I want them to be about the things that are outside.

I am showing you this painting because of the insets, scraped out and put back and scraped out again. I don't do many paintings like this, but it is just very beautiful; it is just trying to be beautiful. This again is a recent painting. I tend to do this quite a lot in pictures, where there is no color and then there is color. It keeps the situation aground. It is very important not to get sleepy when you are making art – that you can do when you are making abstract art. I actually think that figurative art is completely hopeless at this period in time, and I really feel that you just can't do it any more. But the problem with abstraction is that it is very easy to get comfortable. So you are always fighting with the desire to make something meaningful – i.e., to take a structure to the point where it becomes meaningful – and yet that structure has to be criticized. Somehow, one of the ways that I do that is through the use of color, by stripping down the color and putting it in other areas and leaving it out altogether. So there is quite a violence about the way I work, by pulling parts of the painting off or sticking another piece on it. But it gets to be too pleased with itself.

This is a monotype. These monotypes are very important to me because they save me a lot of time. The ways of coloring and painting have gotten progressively wider. What we did with these was simply use pieces of wood. Each area was a piece of wood, and they were cut for me so that they would all go together; and I could move them around and get various configurations. It goes back of course to the painting on the slabs of wood when the pieces of wood were lying on the fence, and it reminds me very strongly of that painting.

This is another monotype. There is a very wonderful lyrical syntax with the rhapsody of the material of the color (which is oil paint) and the grain of the wood and the paper

showing through. In some areas it almost looks like watercolors. In other areas they overprint a great deal.

This is the last slide, and it is of my most recent show in London. The reason I am showing you this is because it represents the way that I really work. Paintings can be made one after another. I don't make ten square paintings: I always try and keep myself in balance if I can, which throws me back on the question of what am I trying to do with this particular painting. I don't work in groups anymore, as I think it is very easy to be awake when you are doing number one and very easy to be awake when you are doing number ten and very easy to be asleep when you are doing all the rest. So I go from one configuration to another (more like a figurative painter): I'm working with triptychs, insets, lines, bars, and stripes all together.